

An interview with Sabrina Corbo, CEO of Green Network UK

Providing green energy and encouraging eco-friendly lifestyles



After working for several international law firms, in 2003, Sabrina Corbo and her husband Piero Saulli founded Green Network SpA in Rome which, today, is one of the main electricity and gas suppliers in Italy with around one million customers between Italy and the UK, and over £2bn in turnover.

Following the success in the Italian energy market, Mrs. Corbo decided to open Green Network UK Plc in 2013, which was followed in 2015 by Green Network Energy Ltd, the first Italian company to supply electricity and gas to both domestic and business customers in the UK. To date, Green Network Energy has over 800,000 domestic and 2,000 business customers.

For her commitment to friendly relationships between the UK and Italy,

Sabrina was made Knight of the Order of the Star of Italy in 2017.

We interviewed Mrs Corbo after she was elected Vice President of the Italian Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the UK, in May 2020.

Not only she plays an important role for the ICCIUK, but most of all she represents an entrepreneur with ethical and moral duties, who is also a mother of three children and therefore ensured that Green Network was a family-friendly company.

ICC: Being a woman CEO, how would you describe female leadership in a green energy company? Would you give us an overview of your experience? What is your perspective of and impact on the company?

SC: Working in the energy market for over 17 years has shown me that women are still often overlooked in this predominantly male sector. I have had to focus on my values and fight the stereotypes often put on me when I first started out. But the energy sector is changing rapidly, and this has given women the unique opportunity to shape the future of energy. We must always encourage women to pursue STEM jobs and challenge the norm. We often bring many skills that a man cannot to the role - whether that is creativity, empathy or seeing things from a new perspective. Diversity often leads to innovation. We will not be able to shape the future of energy if we are still lacking diversity.

ICC: How did your business experience this year so far? Which

new challenges and which new opportunities emerged?

SC: I think I can say many companies will have faced new challenges when the Coronavirus hit. When both Italy and the UK were in lockdown, my main challenge was how I was going to protect and support my staff and the thousands of customers we serve. Shutting both offices in the UK and Italy was definitely a logistical hurdle. But luckily, thanks to my brilliant team and the fact we introduced Salesforce last year, this has enabled us to smoothly transition to a more complete digital service. Our staff could work and answer customer queries from home, while our customers could self-serve with an online account and mobile app. Communicating 100% digitally in teams has shifted how we manage and develop projects. It is definitely strengthened our team and shown that we can still provide exceptional service, even in extraordinary times.

ICC: Which will be your goals in green energy for 2021?

SC: As a company, we want our customers to not only be Green with their energy but with their lifestyle as well. In both the UK and Italy, our goal is to entice all our customers to choose tariffs with 100% renewable energy. We have also worked hard to up the renewables in our Fuel Mix and we hope to offer Green Gas to customers too in the future. To help encourage an eco-friendlier lifestyle, we are also launching a green eCommerce store. This will be a hub of green and ethical lifestyle brands that share our vision of sustainability.

ICC: Which will be your goals in digital for 2021?

SC: Ever since landing the UK, we have understood that the way forward is digital. We are always looking to improve our customer service and the



online experience for our customers. That is why last year we upgraded the online account and mobile app for our customers, offering them a better way to manage their energy. For the future, we are still focused on offering more personalized support and better user experience. We are currently developing a chatbot for our UK-site which will give our customers a 24-hour service with instant answers. Chatbots have been around for a few years, but the pandemic has shown how a 100% digital approach to business is vital.

ICC: After Brexit, we will lose London as the main European digital market, how will you cope with this?

SC: We knew from the beginning that when we entered the UK energy market that Brexit was happening. We predicted, weighed and assessed the risks and I am still proud to invest in Britain. I am also keen to expand into different European markets, most recently we have looked into France. Yet the UK market is still far more competitive, so I am not worried about Brexit. One thing I have learnt from my years in the UK is the British are determined, resilient and will always find a way to adapt. Change can bring difficulties, but it also brings opportunities.

ICC: How do you think governmental institutions could evolve to better support the new green and digital companies?

SC: As companies begin to get back to business, the Government needs to make sure that green thinking is leading the economic recovery. I have found many consumers are now highly engaged with environmental matters. So, the Government needs to invest in long-term consumer demand for green companies and practices. Robust, long-term policies need to be put in place to build business confidence and create a market for green businesses. And further schemes and funding are needed for these businesses with environmental policies at the forefront. To better support green and digital businesses, the Government also needs a coordinated approach. Improved home efficiency, more electric vehicles and better grants for sustainable businesses will all help support a greener lifestyle. And we all need to play our part in ensuring a greener future. ♦

Picture courtesy of Green Network Energy UK

Left: Sabrina Corbo, CEO